

Supervisor Romaine Presents his 2018 State of the Town Address

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Farmingville, NY – On April 3, Supervisor Ed Romaine delivered his sixth State of the Town address in the auditorium at Brookhaven Town Hall. The Supervisor delivered an optimistic look at the great strides that have been made this past year, his new initiatives and the challenges that face the Town in the years ahead. Declaring that the “state of the Town is good and getting better,” the Supervisor opened his address by acknowledging the efforts of the Town Board and the Commissioners, Department heads and employees who serve the residents of the Town of Brookhaven. Pictured is Supervisor Romaine during his State of the Town address with a Great Brookhaven Cleanup T-Shirt to promote the annual event on May 21.

Highlights of Supervisor Romaine’s State of the Town Address include:

Finances

The Supervisor noted that Brookhaven is financially strong, continues to improve each year and has maintained its AAA bond rating from Standard and Poor’s, the highest that can be attained. The Town has also experienced a surplus for the fourth consecutive year. Other highlights of the Town’s strong fiscal position include:

- The funding of certain capital projects including emergency improvements to the Davis Park Marina with \$7 million in cash rather than incurring debt.
- Establishment of a debt reserve fund which will help to offset future debt service costs and assist in financing costly infrastructure improvements.
- Establishment of reserve funds for the landfill closure, snow and tax stabilization.
- A structurally balanced budget.
- Compliance with the Town tax cap, spending cap, and debt cap.
- By staying within the State and Local tax cap, Town residents qualify for a NY State rebate check

Shared Services

As a strong proponent of sharing resources and services to reduce the size, scope and cost of government, Supervisor Romaine said that he will continue to work with our school districts, local taxing districts, the County and State on various shared services opportunities. He also noted that as part of this commitment, the Town put forth a comprehensive plan under the State’s Municipal Consolidation and Efficiency Competition of various shared services that would reduce government spending and save taxpayers’ money. That plan has put Brookhaven in the running as one of only six municipalities in New York State, and the only downstate Town, eligible to receive \$20 million for implementation. The Town is still awaiting word from the Governor’s office on the awarding of this grant.

The Supervisor also stressed that Shared Services is not the only way that the Town can cut costs. Other cost-cutting initiatives include:

- The Town’s recycling center provides the region with a state of the art processing center, which has enabled three other towns, five villages, and seven school districts to enter into municipal agreements with Brookhaven.
- Through energy audits and energy upgrades, we have been able to reduce energy usage in the Town with more upgrades to follow. These upgrades will result in annual savings of over a million dollars.
- A major effort currently underway is the conversion of more than 40,000 streetlights to LED fixtures, which should be completed over the next few years.
- As an outgrowth of the Town’s Municipal Consolidation and Efficiency Competition submittal, the Town Board dissolved eleven special districts.

Economic Development

Noting that in addition to reducing the size of government, a major focus is to create good paying jobs in Brookhaven. Highlights of the Town’s economic growth include:

- Phase 1 of the Ronkonkoma Hub Project is currently under construction with an estimated 450 residential units. Phase 2 plans are being finalized.
- Yaphank Meadows located on William Floyd Parkway has completed Phase 1 including fully rented apartments, a hotel, and an assisted living facility with Phase 2 to begin shortly.
- The Industrial Development Agency (IDA) closed on 20 projects that will result in \$435,000,000 of private investment and the creation of 4,050 permanent or construction jobs.
- The IDA has 13 approved projects that have or are about to close in 2018, with the potential for another \$440 million of private investment into our Town, creating or retaining another 1,000 jobs.
- The Town remains in the running for Amazon's second headquarters, which would produce an estimated 50,000 jobs.

In addition, Brookhaven's Industrial Development Agency (IDA) was named the "IDA of the Year for 2017" by the Long Island Business News.

The Environment

As Long Island's leader in protecting the environment, Supervisor Romaine said the Town will develop a "green" future at the Waste Management Complex once the Landfill closes. Designs have begun on the concept of an Energy Park consisting of fuel cell energy, landfill gas energy, biogas energy, and solar energy. At the heart of this proposed project is community solar, with up to 40 acres of flat, "solar ready" land available for development by the end of 2018. These 40 acres could produce up to 10 megawatts of solar power, powering up to 1,200 houses without the clearing of a single tree. An additional 30 acres would be available for solar by 2025. When complete, the Brookhaven Energy Park could generate an estimated 40 megawatts of electricity through various green technologies.

Likewise, the Town will protect its trees and forested areas. Deforestation is the leading cause of increased carbon dioxide in our planet's atmosphere. Our coastlines are paying a high price. We will not trade Green for Green.

The Supervisor stated that the Town passed legislation in 2016 making it unlawful to cut down trees for solar farms in favor of solar panels on the roofs of office and industrial buildings, parking lots and vacant land. He also thanked Senator Ken LaValle, Assemblyman Steve Englebright and Assemblyman Anthony Palumbo, who succeeded in having 800 acres in Shoreham (the National Grid property) and some 250 acres in Mastic added to the Pine Barrens.

In addition to our green policies on land, the Town has:

- Promoted a Town-wide shellfish program which seeds north shore harbors and south shore bays with two million oysters, one million hard clams, and 70,000 seed scallops each year.
- Partnered with the Friends of Bellport Bay, volunteers from the Moriches Bay Project, and several other environmental groups to restore the Town's shellfish population and the cleaning of bays as ancillaries to the previously mentioned program.
- Planned to sponsor events to supply more eelgrass plants for restoration in the Bellport Bay area.

Climate Change and Sea Rise

Brookhaven Town has the largest coastline of any own in New York State and global climate change and sea level rise poses a significant challenge in the decades ahead. To better protect low lying areas and reduce future impacts to the health and safety of Town residents and their property, the Supervisor has embraced a concept of letting nature reclaim wetlands through a "strategic retreat" regarding residential and commercial development in areas that are susceptible to flooding. To meet the challenge, the Town has partnered with the Nature Conservancy and New York Rising to remove homes rendered uninhabitable by Superstorm Sandy. The vacant land will then be restored to marshland, preserving these vital wetlands as a critical part of the Town's plan to address sea rise.

Land Use

Stating that land use and zoning are among the most important powers a Town government can exercise, the Supervisor said that the Town is working to redesign many communities to avoid unneeded strip shopping centers and retail development, stressing that residents need to be afforded a voice in the future of their communities. Highlights include:

- Finalizing plans and looking to implement a Port Jefferson Station plan adjacent to the train station.

- Updating the Medford Land Use Plan.
- Completing a Land Use Plan for the headwaters of the Forge River.

Quality of Life and Housing Code Enforcement

Supervisor Romaine reinforced his commitment to improve the quality of life in every community by strict enforcement of the Town's building, fire and housing codes and ridding neighborhoods of dangerous "zombie houses." He also repeated his call to residents, "if you see something, say something" if there is a "zombie house" in their neighborhood.

In 2017, the Town:

- Demolished more than 150 abandoned, unsafe structures
- Boarded up over 1,750 vacant houses
- Continued the fight against illegal student housing in many communities including Stony Brook

In 2017, the Supervisor also announced that the Town is seeking state and federal assistance to allow for the purchase of some abandoned homes. By working with the Long Island Housing Partnership and the Long Island Builders Institute, he proposed to rehab and sell some of these homes at affordable prices to first time homebuyers and veterans. Money obtained from the sale of these homes would then be placed in a revolving fund to purchase, rehab, and sell other former zombie homes as affordable housing.

Solid Waste Management

A challenge facing Brookhaven, and all of Long Island, is the pending closure of the Landfill in six and a half years. This should be a wake-up call for the development of a Regional Solid Waste Plan. The Supervisor has made a commitment to work with NYS DEC and the other towns and villages to formulate a Regional Plan for solid waste disposal for Long Island.

Public Transportation

Supervisor Romaine stressed the need for a better, more efficient mass transportation system that is based on 21st century technology and coordinated train and bus routes. He repeated his call from 2017 to extend the electrified rail lines to Port Jefferson, Mastic/Shirley and Yaphank to better accommodate eastern Long Island riders. He said, "we are part of one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world. It is time for a better transportation system, one based on 21st Century innovation, not 19th Century technology."

Property Assessment

The Supervisor pointed out the work of the Assessor's Office, which was able to increase the taxable value of the Assessment Rolls for the last two years. He indicated that there has been a significant decrease in the number of annual grievances and Small Claims Assessment Review Petitions in the last two years, which has resulted in a 61% decrease in the Town's cost of litigation, saving the typical Brookhaven homeowner about \$170 in the current 2017-18 tax year.

In 2010, the Long Island Power Authority filed a lawsuit against the Town of Brookhaven, claiming that the National Grid plant in Port Jefferson, which was under contract to LIPA, was paying too much in taxes. During his speech, the Supervisor announced that the Town has reached an agreement in principal with LIPA to settle this case and avoid unnecessary costs that would result from continuing this case. The assessment on the little-used plant will gradually be reduced over the next nine years, with a guarantee by LIPA that savings from the lower assessment will be returned to the ratepayers in the form of lower electric bills.

To watch Supervisor Romaine's State of the Town address, visit www.brookhavenny.gov .